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# **Craft as Resistance: A Conversation About Craftivism, Embodied Inquiry and Craft-based Methodologies**

**Ann Rippin and Sheena J. Vachhani**

## Introduction

Craft and making cultures have enjoyed a recent resurgence with sociologists, philosophers and social theorists arguing that a ‘back to basics’ culture is socially connective. As Gauntlett argues (2011: 2), making is connective because ‘acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people’. In addition, in the act of making things ‘we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments’ (*ibid.* 2). Cultures of making, sharing and organizing through craft have hitherto been marginal in studies of management and organization. The increased popularity of everyday creativity, do-it-yourself cultures and forgotten craft activities has much to teach organizational scholars and deserves closer attention (Vachhani 2013). These are also sites of resistance that serve as innovative strategies to challenge inequalities and this chapter explores the tensions between craft and academic work. We expose the tensions and contradictory dynamics of academic publishing that may promote innovative methodological and writing practices but under the weight of standardization and competition are still unable to adequately accommodate craft-based methodologies. Building on the theme of craft as resistance, we also examine the meaning and potential of ‘craftivism’ as a critical resource that can be used to challenge organizational oppression and exploitation (see Parker 1996; Agosin 2014). The term

‘craftivism’ has been coined recently (Greer 2008) and fuses ‘craft’ and ‘activism’ to denote craft practices that form explicit political activism, such as knitting placed in public spaces as in the case of yarnbombing (Moore and Prain 2009). Craft practices become sites of resistance and we discuss themes around craft-based methodologies, resistance and embodied inquiry through a dialogue with Ann Rippin whose fascinating work employs textiles and craft-based methodologies using practices of quilting to explore the materiality of the text, foundation myths and leadership (Rippin 2007).

As a practitioner and academic, Ann makes textile art especially large, heavily surface-decorated and embroidered quilts as part of her research and teaching on work and organisation. Ann has researched organisations such as Marks and Spencer, The Body Shop, Starbucks and Nike and also made art dolls as a way of exploring the Laura Ashley brand and its place in the hearts of British quilters<sup>1</sup>. Ann’s cutting-edge and multiple media work uses techniques of juxtaposition and is heavily influenced by the work of Walter Benjamin. In our dialogue we reflect on our experiences of working at the intersections of craft practice, organization and academia and explore the potential and challenges of using non-traditional, arts-based methods to act, resist or speak out as a means of challenging organization. We further this discussion by connecting personal experiences with the role of craft in a global political context and address the relationship between craft and academia.

We begin the chapter by setting the scene and situating craft and craftivism in recent discussions of everyday creativity and craft as a force for social connection and challenge to mass production driven consumer culture. We continue by drawing on

Ann's personal history and academic work as a way of unearthing a number of intellectual and conceptual concerns in the use of craft practices and arts-based methods for understanding organizations. We take a rather unusual approach by developing a biographical conversation to explore and reflect on the practices Ann employs in her academic work. Thus, our aim is to interweave personal history and conceptual arguments that extend the ways in which craft practices and resistance are conceived. We then provide some critical reflections on craftivism and its subversive potential. The chapter is shaped around a number of personal themes that engage different modes of craft-based resistance, namely: the relationships between the intellectual and the haptic, the sensory basis for textile work; resistance and utopian notions of craft; generosity and scarcity in producing craft objects such as the abundance of materials for use in textiles workshops; and the influence of De Certeau and Benjamin in the conceptual thinking behind some of the projects and pieces Ann has produced.

### Situating craft and craftivism

Craft has long since been considered part of identity-making projects involving socially connective activities. This consolidates the somewhat romantic notion that craft can bring people together (Dissanayake 1995; Dormer 1997) through communal, group-based activities. Dissanayake (1995: 41) explores the inherent pleasure in making, the *joie de faire*, in using 'one's own agency, dexterity, feelings, and judgment to mold, form, touch, hold, and craft physical materials', which insinuates a more vibrant, grass-roots pride grounded in everyday nature associated with craft.

Discussions of craft have inevitably led to defining its position in relation to art and other forms of creative expression. As Gauntlett (2011: 22-3) cogently summarizes, ‘the term “craft” is further complicated by its relationship with “art”. Somehow the two concepts have become separated, so that “art” tends to mean the truly creative transformation of ideas and emotions into visual objects (or texts, or performances, music, or whatever), whilst “craft” – having been shoved out of that space – ends up indicating the less prestigious production of carvings or pots, by less creative people who just like making carvings or pots’. The political terrain in which the divisions between art and craft have long been contested and have led to the separation between ‘having ideas’ and ‘making objects’ (Dormer 1997). The split between art and craft has also led to the marginalization of women’s work (Parker 1996) as women have been traditionally associated with craft work, and men with art. Craft continues to be positioned and constructed in different ways depending on whether one focuses on artisanal, factory-based craft, recreational crafters, or craftspeople whose work is more akin to fine art. An instructive case example is the work of Grayson Perry. We can see his work through the lens of Bourdieu (1980): Perry makes work in ceramics and textiles, both associated with women and with craft, but it is coded as art by an elite, culminating in a Turner Prize in 2003.

For writers such as Gauntlett (2011) making and sharing are already political acts which, whilst small, cumulatively challenge larger social institutions such as popular media or giant supermarkets. In contrast, craftivism is considered part of the gentle revolution away from mass production driven consumer culture

towards a conscious effort to make and overtly resist the strictures of capitalism, not least the appropriation of public spaces by large companies through their advertising and occupation of urban properties. Craftivism gently but firmly critiques the homogenization of the high street.

However, craft-based activism is not a new idea, something Greer acknowledges.

The idea that the decorative can become subversive is well-worn.

In *The Subversive Stitch*, Rozsika Parker (1996) explores how the art of embroidery has been used both to educate women into the ideals of femininity but also as acts of resistance to the constraints of femininity. Homecraft as well as financial recession both led in different ways to the rise of embroidery as a skill and decorative practice. Parker writes that the context for embroidery practice has changed since the backlash against feminism following its Second Wave. Rejecting women's traditional crafts became a moment of feminist resistance that led to an ambivalence of embroidery as a source of creative satisfaction but also an emblem or instrument for oppression. Feminism is part of both authors' academic practice and this ambivalence has long since fascinated us. The discussion of the subversive potential and political construction of craft culture serves to situate recent theoretical debates around the development of craft activities in contemporary western society and how craft has been historically associated with resistance. The chapter now turns to Ann's work as a way of reflecting and drawing out themes of craft-based resistance.

*SV: Let's start with your history and discuss how you got into using textiles as a way of understanding organisations.*

AR: I think I have to start at my university days. I went to a brilliant set of schools, but it was at university that I was confronted with the growing nostrum that knowledge is always incomplete and temporary. At school it was still pretty much about getting to the right answer. It was at university that this was questioned and problematized. Someone unfortunately now forgotten by me said, 'Always admit the possibility that you might not have the monopoly on truth'. I don't think I was constitutionally ready to hear this, but it certainly made a huge impact on me. Much of my degree was in French, just before it became saturated in post-structuralism but at the right time for existentialism to have permeated everything, and le nouveau roman to become influential. I was interested in the new novel with its repetitions of scenes and truths as seen and experienced by different characters. There is no one single truth, everything is open to interpretation and reinterpretation.

This might seem a long way from textiles, but it isn't. They are wonderful for showing two sides of something (such as a cushion with a front and back showing different aspects of a social phenomenon, which several students have produced over the years) or a piece which shows its workings - that it is something constructed and not a single finished item descended from some epistemological heaven. And it can be bold. One of the earliest pieces I made was my Nike Doll. I was teaching the Nike case to Business Strategy students, and, funnily enough, at twenty years old they wanted to talk about globalisation and its impacts. The case though did not admit this. It was about the marketing genius and business strategy of Phil Knight. The students wanted to talk about child labour and the impact of global branding, but there was no

room for this in the seminars. I was frustrated by this and went home and made a doll. This was how a lot of my early textile work started. I was upset or angry and went home and put all this pent up emotion into cloth. I made a very traditional doll called a tipsy turvy or upside down doll which has a different doll at each end separated and united by a skirt which obscures one while revealing the other. An example would be Red Riding Hood at one end and the Wolf at the other. Mine had the all American girl with blonde plaits and a shiny polyester stars and stripes frock at one end and a rag doll representing the factory worker in Indonesia making the shoes. The further away you position yourself from the site of production the easier it is to salve your conscience about working conditions.

However, this epistemological approach raises tensions of craft-based methodologies and their ambivalent relationship to academic work. The role of curiosity, intuition, imagination, tentativeness and creativity become diametrically opposed with the desire for certainty the Academy rewards, especially in positivist approaches. The irony is that the positivist approach and the craft or studio-based practice approach start from the same place: curiosity and intuition. The positivist starts from a hypothesis based on an intuition, applying a selection of tests to prove or disprove it. The art practice researcher begins in a similar place: curiosity about a phenomenon. The difference is in the choice of research instrument – the self, with little concern given to validity and replicability, and the disposition, mentioned above that there can be no final definitive account of a social phenomenon.

It should also be noted that art practice researchers have a different way of listening to their data and engaging in embodied inquiry. Positivists sometime describe their



coding procedures as listening to data, but generally they mean playing very close attention to patterns which emerge in, say interview transcripts. There is seldom an admission that these are produced from the *habitus* of the researcher, the mental universe of class, education, ethnicity, political affiliation, nationality and so on. Art practitioners, on the other hand, are explicit that they listen to their work, waiting for it to talk to them, possibly months or years later through the comments of others viewing the final product. Studio practitioners like Barrett and Bolt (2010) make this an explicit part of their process, describing an ‘exegesis’ as they seek what their paintings have to tell them (Barrett & Bolt 2010). This notion that matter, in the form of paint, fabric, clay, steel or similar, can have a voice and that matter can be vibrant is now gaining respectability through the work of new materialists such as Jane Bennett (2010) and has been explored through perspectives such as actor network theory in management and organization studies (Law & Hassard 1999).

Virtually all makers report the phenomenon of entering into a dialogue with the art piece, many reporting that the piece tells the maker when it is finished, something that comes up at almost every workshop I have attended. At one level, we instinctively understand this approach, so that we understand Sophie Strong, an embroiderer when she writes:

To allow the stitches to speak, [I] work with plain, hardwearing fabrics in muted tones, applying colour with thread. (Perry 2014: 83)

Again, the conversation is informed by the maker's *habitus*. The difference is that this is made explicit, and in some cases celebrated. The maker's point of view, or personal style is often highly valued.

The debate about whether art is useful or useless (as Oscar Wilde would have us believe: All art is completely useless – in the Preface to *A Picture of Dorian Grey*), is as fraught as the debate about the difference between art and craft, as described above. Art has a fine tradition of the political, from satire to political cartoons. In contemporary art in the UK, as we have seen, Grayson Perry has crossed the divide between the high art world, winning his Turner Prize in 2003, and Banksy has refreshed the visual lampoon with his spray cans. Although Perry now has a studio with assistants, both he and Banksy are largely heroic, individual actors. Their form of resistance is effectively authored. Having explored the divides and tensions in using craft-based methodologies, we turn now to a less individualized, more collective form of resistance through craft.

### Reflections on Craftivism

*SV: We have spent time thus far discussing craft-based methodologies. Let's turn to less individualized forms of resistance. What are your thoughts on craftivism as a way of bringing ostensibly overt and group-based forms of resistance and craft together?*

AR: I once scored a tremendous hit at a conference where I described myself as a scholar activist. This was extremely popular with other academics. I think they liked the idea of being revolutionaries in the spirit of '66 hurling paving stones

metaphorical or otherwise. My activism, however, is of a rather quieter kind. Johnella Bird describes looking for ‘talk that sings’ when she interviews people, by which she means the words that really resonate in telling a story and bring it to life. This is what I am looking for in my work: imagery that sings, that draws people in and makes them want to engage with the thoughts behind the piece. I do not want to shock or confront people, but I do want them to hear the mermaid’s song and be drawn in. Beauty as much as horror can change the world and new materialist thinking, such as Bennett (2010), that focuses our attention on the agency of materials and objects is a good place to start to think about craftivism.

I was brought up in primary school as a very small child with myths from the Greeks and Romans. I read them in the versions written by Rosemary Sutcliffe, Roger Lancelyn Green and Geoffrey Treece. One of the entrancing things about the stories was the illustrated versions from the artists Janet and Anne Grahame Johnstone which had warriors of Modigliani-like proportions and gracefully arching feathers in their sparkling helmets. Later on, I moved onto the faintly ridiculously scholarly versions by Robert Graves as the anthropologists really got their teeth into what these myths were all about. I received an early lesson in aesthetics which has stayed with me, as well as a fundamental human truth, Amazons aside, that men go out and do the heroic things and women stay at home making sure the hero has a home to return to. In fact, in biology lessons it was pointed out to the all-girls class that the medical symbol for men was a circle with an arrow pointing to the heavens while the one for female was a circle on a cross, the woman sitting waiting for his return. It was the early days of the second wave of feminism so at least the teacher had the grace to apologize and roll her eyes.

The point I want to make here is that for most of the planet now, and for most of history, men have been dominant and women have been suppressed. Being suppressed is a tricky position. You have little or no power, a contrast to the arguments made by postfeminists around the control and agency of women in modern society (cf. Gill & Scharff 2011). I cannot think of a better way of putting it than if you are oppressed or suppressed, you often have to make nice, and you have to learn to hint.

Craftivists rely on a sense of niceness. They do not bomb or set fire to things. They even soften the notion of bombing by prefixing it with soft yarn. Yarn, again, has always been associated with women and with women organizing in the domestic sphere. You cannot produce woven cloth without a group effort in a settled location. You need to grow linen or farm sheep and you need a range of skills from treating the raw fibre to spinning it, weaving it, cutting it and stitching it. Communities, to return to the theme of social connectedness, are necessary to produce textiles. Textiles form a buffer against the hardship of life. Elaine Scarry (1985) suggests that creativity is a response to and alleviation of suffering, and textiles are a good example of this. They protect the wearer throughout life. Craftivists play with this notion. They soften and buffer the urban world which can be cruel and dehumanizing. Thus they make small scale interventions such as knitting a cuff for a tree or embroidering tiny banners to hang on metal fences, or wrap up defunct petrol stations with quilts to protest against urban degeneration. These threaten no-one. They are not permanent like graffiti. Eventually they will degrade back into the earth. They wait patiently to catch the eye; they hint. Their form of resistance is gentle, sometimes tacit. This is a long-

established tradition as can be seen from those Greek myths which are full of fibres, threads and textiles. Agamemnon and Achilles were farmers when they weren't being warriors and their wealth came from agriculture, part of which was spinning and weaving the production of an exchangeable item. Their tunics, cloaks and togas were made of wool not cotton. Textile production was vital to the ancient economy.

In this context, we can think about Penelope, wife of Odysseus, sitting at home waiting for his return from the Trojan War. Penelope had twenty years of waiting for her husband to return. During this time, she is repeatedly pestered by men wanting to marry her. The patriarchy in action if you will: a woman cannot live unclaimed by a man. Penelope tells them that she will choose a new husband when she has finished either weaving or embroidering depending on the source, a shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes. For three years she weaves in the day and then at night undoes the work. To a practising textile artist, this is clearly nonsense. The constant undoing and redoing would produce a rather tatty piece of work, dirty and with fraying support threads, but there is no mention of this. What matters is that Penelope is skilled with textiles making her economically useful in this agrarian society. She also remains sexually chaste and thus above reproach as the mother of legitimate children. I mention her because she is powerless and yet she survives on her wits and through the work of her hands. What she produces seduces men into respecting her and allowing her to live her own life. I expect that there has been speculation about what she was weaving or embroidering into her work. Penelope survived, it seems to me, because she could seduce by her economic utility.

Moving forward to Victorian times, little girls were taught to sew to improve their economic prospects. Poor girls could become seamstresses, or go into service, which at some point would have included marking linen for the laundry and hence the rise of the sampler, an educational device which has been rendered into a decorator icon. Rich Victorian girls were taught to produce fine needlework as part of their list of accomplishments to get a good husband. Needlework was plain or ornate, and instruction manuals reflected this well into the twentieth century. Once again, like Penelope, after whom a brand of tapestry wool used to be named, women showed their worth with their textile skills. There was very little sign of resistance. There is one nineteenth-century American sampler with an unusual sentiment. Generally sampler quotations are about early death or reflect the maker's piety. The one I am thinking about, however, said something like: 'Mary Smith made this and hated every stitch she did'. Generally, the samplers showed Christian virtue, women's sinfulness through the strangely frequent Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge motif, and expertise with the needle. Once again, for the stitcher, seduction was achieved through textile skill.

Craftivism takes on this tradition. A great deal has changed for women in the two hundred years since Seneca Falls and The Pankhursts, but genuine and full emancipation has yet to be achieved. Craftivists have noticed this. In my understanding most Craftivists are women. They do not identify themselves as artists, who have produced subversive works for centuries. They identify as 'crafters'. There is a distinction here between 'crafters' and 'craftspeople'. Crafters practise a variety of handicrafts, for example: knitting, embroidery, macramé, patchwork and quilting, paper crafts and weaving. Cardmaking, in particular, has

undergone an explosion of interest in the last ten years. These are generally made for special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, engagements, new babies and new homes. They are very elaborate and often three dimensional but almost always made from pre-formed elements which are largely just assembled by the crafter. The other crafts are also about home and family making. They promote social coherence and community making and are, often associated with traditional milestones in women's lives. Quilts are made to mark births and marriages and deaths. Making a quilt from a dead partner's shirts remains a socially sanctioned way of mourning the death of spouse in the quilting world. Quilts are also made for significant birthdays and children leaving for university. Increasingly quilts are made to mark retirement from paid employment, and there is a significant rise in the number of quilts made to celebrate divorce. Craftivists on the other hand, tend to engage more with the outside world. As mentioned above, they represent an attempt to reclaim the high street by placing hand-made, one-off items in public, often urban areas to protest different causes, such as the environmental impact of global brands or the corporate colonization of public space.

Craftivists are usually committed to recycling or upcycling materials. Their banners are likely to be made from salvaged curtains, for example (see Greer, 2008, for particular examples). To buy special materials would be seen as contributing to the mounds of over-produced materials going into landfill and thus to the problem of global consumption which they challenge. 'Crafters', on the other hand have recourse to a whole selection of commercial resources frequently looked down on by craftspersons. They have almost 24-hour television channels dedicated to selling them the materials to practise their crafts, along with big box stores in retail parks and

sprawling enterprises on the internet. These are all sold as promoting women's creativity. However, what is produced is a different combination of the pre-formed elements on offer. The 'sentiments', as they are called, are prepared for crafters to stick onto the hand-made card, cupcake or cushion.

Craftivists aim to subvert this. What matters is the message. Recycling is positively encouraged rather than buying new and pristine 'supplies'. Group endeavours rather than the meek, single woman sewing with her neck bent and head down in silent contemplation, are a central feature of craftivism. Craftivists aim to critique the man-made, and I use that term deliberately. This can include the perfect body form demanded by the fashion and beauty industry, the effects of globalization on the high street, the pressure for land which forces out local people in favour of expensive housing for incomers, and all other effects of capitalism, globalization, the industrial military complex and any other effects of the masculine hegemony we have omitted. The method is to use craft, particularly knitting in yarn-bombing activities, but also sewing, particularly patchwork and quilting, so closely associated with the domestic, the comforting and the protective. Hence craftivists will produce small tie-on samplers protesting about an issue while simultaneously quoting the implicit oppression in the sampler form. They will cover a redundant petrol station in patchwork to draw attention to the environmental degradation of the petrol economy. They will knit and crochet tubes to attach to trees or benches in public areas as an act of reclamation of public space.



*SV: These practices of gentle resistance can have unintended consequences, or not quite achieve their aims. Do you have any reservations with craftivist approaches to resistance?*

AR: I am broadly in favour of these subversive acts. I know that I would thoroughly enjoy the adrenaline rush of wrapping a tree in the dead of night, trying to avoid the surveillance cameras that capture so much of our life. I have certain reservations, or indeed questions:

Firstly, is this another form of oppression? If we see objects having agency in the landscape of craftivist practice we need also to consider that no tree ever asked to be wrapped in knitting, no derelict petrol station asked to be further humiliated by being wrapped in a patchwork cosy.

Secondly, we have discussed the use of materials and recycling in craft-based resistance and a purist might consider the use of unnatural acrylic fibres antithetical to the core purpose of craftivism, such as yarnbombing (Moore & Prain, 2009). I can see that this juxtaposes the natural and the unnatural. I understand that craftivism and thrift go together and that acrylic yarn is cheap and plentiful and virtually indestructible, therefore making a strong statement about bio politics and environmentalism. This is a taste judgement of course but the use of unnatural, acrylic fibres forgets the rich history of yarn and wool that is part of the culture of knitting and crocheting.

Finally, I am aware of the tensions that it might reinforce the links with women and powerless, domesticity, stealth and hinting. It is a matter of perspective as to whether it brings about social change or any persistence, is largely seen as a spectacle or that it does much to raise the consciousness of young women. Craftivism is associated with women organising, often feminist organising that is facilitative or galvanises feminist community and communality. This may well involve discussion of feminism as participants work together, for example. It also draws on prescribed feminine values. In a recent New York Times article by Wollan (2011), Jessie Hemmons, at the time a 24-year old artist, emphasises the femininity of yarnbombing, stating, “Street art and graffiti are usually so male dominated... Yarn bombing is more feminine. It’s like graffiti with grandma sweaters.”

*SV: We have explored different moments in women’s organising thus far. Drawing on feminist and feminine values seems to feed into your work as an embodied inquirer. Do you recognise some of the themes in, for example craftivism, in your own textile work?*

AR: Having said all this, I can move on to consider my own work in these terms. First, I can clearly state that I do not think that it has any impact at all. I do it largely for myself. I hope that what I sew occasionally causes someone to see the world differently for a moment, but I don’t think it compares with, say, Guernica or Goya’s Disasters of War. I do it because I have to. I do it because it is my voice. And I do it for pleasure. This last point is possibly the most subversive of all. One of the most damaging things about the commodification and monetization of academic work and higher education more broadly is that it has ceased to acknowledge the pleasures of

scholarship. My work insists on this and refuses to let it be expunged from what is valuable. My pleasure in my work is entirely sensory. I love the feel of the various fabrics I use: linen, cotton, silk, wool. I love the sound of the needle going through a piece of cloth as I stitch it. I love the crunchiness of layers of embroidering stitches encrusting a surface. I love the sparkle of beads and sequins. I love the way one stitch can affect the success or failure of the whole piece in terms of balance, rhythm and repetition. I love the smell of paint and of pure cotton. I love to feel really sharp scissors slice through cloth. This is an example of what Audre Lorde called the erotic (Lorde 2007). It is a form of the life force which courses through our bodies, and that is the key point here. This is an embodied response to the world and learning about it. And it is one of pleasure. Hence Lorde says that there is no difference to her between painting a fence, moving against her lover's body or writing a poem except the degree of the erotic. This is now almost entirely absent from academic work. To admit to seeing beauty in something and responding to it bodily would be considered quite suspect. To write about the (admittedly rare) joy in seeing a company run on love working beautifully would be to open oneself to accusations of a loss of objectivity and critical thinking. And yet there is always something of Lorde's erotic in academic work. Seeing a pattern in data, suddenly understanding something previously mystifying, finding a missing element in an argument, discovering something, or constructing the text when writing up a piece of research can surprise us with joy, joy which is felt in the body.

*SV: You can feel this sense of the erotic in your work and the pleasure that is derived from it. What kinds of techniques does this involve?*

My work is quite deliberately excessive. I have always worked in layers. I will stitch an area on a piece of work and then put fabric over it and stitch again. I like the idea of secrets in the work. Only I know they are there. It is a covert relationship with the work even when it is out of my hands and out in the world. The notion of layers and gaps and holes brings me to De Certeau in his essay on Jules Verne and the impossibility of ever really saying anything with any great certainty. De Certeau talks about knowledge as being an amassing of holey layers, fissures and lacunae. As De Certeau points out, this all looks solid from a distance. Our research looks valid and verified and testable, but actually, it is a pile of gappy accounts which we hope will convince a reader. My textiles make a virtue of this.

INSERT FIGURE X.1 ABOUT HERE

**Figure X.1: ‘Detail of a quilt about The Body Shop and identity’ by Ann Rippin**

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This is detail of a quilt I made about the Body Shop and identity. I was heavily influenced by Anita Roddick when I was growing up in Nottingham, and the piece which was ostensibly about Roddick, turned into an exploration of my association with the Body Shop brand and how it shaped my identity. Anita Roddick was an activist and entrepreneur. I am a disappointed romantic who regrets the fact that the world could be a much better place but never actually does anything about it. In the above panel, I was thinking about the Body Shop and geographic locations. I encountered and fell in love with the brand in Nottingham. I did a long research project and met Roddick in Littlehampton. I began a long period of reflection and research on the company in Bristol. The Nottingham piece has three almost standing

stone pieces of Nottingham lace, stitched and dyed, over another piece, over a piece of crimson silk. Identity has to be constructed. It appears as a monolith but it's an illusion. What we have are layers, and the layers are incomplete, like lace. The bits that are missing, the negative form is what makes lace lace. Good handmade lace is one thread according to the Bristol lacemakers. If you undo the knot and pull the end the whole thing unravels. Which is an interesting metaphor in itself (we are reminded of the ball of thread in the myth of Ariadne and Theseus). But the lace here is tough, machine-made lace in artificial fibres. What looks like a fairly dense, solid panel is anything but. It is machine-made and hand-made. It is delicate and it is tough. It is expensive and it is cheap. It is made of lace, the fabric of the virginal and the vampish. The whole piece is ambiguous and capable of any number of readings, like identity, like Roddick, like a brand.

#### Thoughts on juxtaposition

*SV: I remember coming to one of your talks which was to a women's group of embroiderers and knitters in Ystradowen in South Wales. In the talk you explored the Laura Ashley project and the idea of juxtaposing techniques of embroidery, embellishment and the insertion of images to invite different interpretations. Could you elaborate on this practice and how what you produce for pleasure differs from your academic textile pieces?*

AR: One of the elements that distinguishes my academic quilts from my pieces made purely for my own pleasure, is a desire to get people to look again and to look more closely, and to make up their own minds. Heather Höpfl and Steve Linstead wrote

about the baroque quality of organisational life, the way that we are bombarded with material objects to keep us docile and compliant through sheer deluge (Linstead and Hopfl, 2000). Corporate branding and authorised imagery are good and ever-growing examples of this. Advertising and the internet add to this baroque piling on of detail to stun us into awed silence and to overpower any impulse to resistance that we might have. Höpfl and Linstead advocated re-sensitising ourselves to this subliminal invasion by looking again. Benjamin, in his last great, unfinished Arcades project, added an overtly pedagogic element to this, and John Berger took it up and illustrated it particularly clearly in *Ways of Seeing*. Benjamin was interested in the dazzle of merchandising, particularly in luxurious shops, and through plate glass windows filled with lovely shiny things that we feel we absolutely must have. He decided that to make his point about the seductiveness of capitalism he would let his readers work things out for themselves in a kind of early action learning, through juxtaposing images and letting people make up their own minds. By placing two elements together people are invited to compare and contrast and thus draw conclusions without being preached at. Berger does this brilliantly with a nineteenth-century reportage picture of a child in abject poverty on one page juxtaposed with a painting of a poor child from the ‘big-eyed’ school of art. The sentimentalisation of the painting shows us how we allow ourselves to absent responsibility for the urban poor. It holds a mirror up to human behaviour where we may put the painting on our walls, but we wouldn’t let the actual child over the threshold.

INSERT FIGURE X.2 ABOUT HERE

**Figure X.2: ‘Image from textile project on Starbucks’ by Ann Rippin**

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This juxtaposition takes us to my textile project on Starbucks. In the piece above, I juxtaposed all sorts of images: luxurious cups of coffee with women picking the beans on subsistence wages; the individuality of local cafés compared with the corporate uniformity of Starbucks; the romance of Italy with the reality of boxy shops in rainy Bristol and so on. I don't make any direct judgements in the piece itself. I just put the pictures together and let people make their own minds up.

*SV: How else do you think your work addresses issues of resistance?*

AR: On two main levels, I think. If I think about management practice, and what I used to teach, and train in before that, I think it challenges the lean, efficiency, target setting agenda. Doing more with less is a mantra that seems to be the epitome of the management message, not least in universities. Business Process Reengineering, Total Quality Management and lean thinking were all about eliminating waste and stripping out the surplus. My own work is excessive, as I have already described, but I found that in workshops people respond ridiculously positively to having lots of materials, being able to take what they want without asking and to waste and make mistakes.

Writers on creativity do talk about this in rather abstract forms. Eliminate the fear culture. Allow people to make mistakes and so on, but I have discovered that providing people with a lot of material in my workshops enables them to establish rapport with me and to go into a space they rarely experience. From a psychodynamic perspective this makes me the all-providing mother, the nurturer they

never had, or did have and now miss, and that might well be true, but at another more mundane level, I think they respond well to being given a gift. You have to do things, if you want people to be creative, which says to them: You matter. I have brought this material to you and for you. I want you to have everything you could possibly need and you can take it all and use it in any way you like to make you feel good. Adults in my workshops appreciate this generosity, and it feels counter-cultural. I can provide a number of examples, but at the end of the workshop someone always says, 'I can't believe you brought us all this stuff.' In conventional gift theory, they reciprocate by doing the task but I also think that they respond to generosity at a really fundamental level.

Allied to this, I get asked quite often where I get my ideas from and if I know how something is going to turn out before I make it. I don't always know where ideas come from. They come from my habitus, and what Barthes would call my image repertoire, so they come from me, my life and my experience. I never know how a piece will turn out before I make it. If I did I wouldn't need to make it. I let it evolve and let it tell me what it wants to be. Again, this is antithetical to traditional academic work. Applying for grant funding you are expected to know your outcomes, have a research plan and well thought out research design. The idea of listening to the materials, channeling their needs and ambitions is not appealing to funding bodies. You have to be brave and self-sufficient to do this sort of work.

The other level is more philosophical and concerns the importance of the made. There is much media coverage about making, from the wild success of the Great British Bake Off to Japanese designated National Treasures making sword



blades, to a crop of painting shows, to Robot Wars. We seem to be surprised by our own delight in our ability to make things ourselves. What I am interested in here, and we both are, is the way in which you cannot make something without leaving a trace of yourself on it or in it. One of the more bizarre episodes of my professional life was being invited to have a look at an advanced level Japanese embroidery workshop in the Cotswolds. I was expressly not allowed to breathe on the work in progress. The embroiderer would fold back a piece of covering cloth and I could have a look at what was revealed as I held my breath. What was at stake was my polluting the maker's bodily connection with the work. As an embroiderer myself, I know that my body is transferred into my work at a mundane level. Mary Douglas' dirt that is matter out of place (Douglas 1966): skin oil, saliva from threading needles, fibres of various sorts and tiny flakes of skin work their way into the textile. Plus, no stitcher will ever make and place stitches in exactly the same way, just as experts can tell reproductions from the original by looking at an artist's brush strokes. All this matters because it insists on the personal and the embodied, what we are often exhorted not to include in our published work. Insisting on the embodied and personal is a defiant act of resistance to the disciplinary regimes that are unable to accommodate craft-based methodologies. I am an embodied inquirer, and, I suppose, I matter.

### Concluding Thoughts

Talking through the themes of this chapter and writing it together has enabled us to reflect on the histories and processes at the intersections between craft, textiles and academic practice. We have developed this discussion to consider ways in which resistance and craft meet, such as craftivism, and have drawn on Ann's extensive

experience as a practitioner and academic and the tensions between craft and academic work. It is hard not to be struck by the textures achieved in her work through layering and juxtaposing different materials and techniques. This serves to highlight the opportunities that arise from using craft-based methods to convey complex organizational issues and histories, such as the Laura Ashley and Starbucks projects explored in our dialogue (see Taylor & Ladkin, 2009, for a discussion of arts-based methods and managerial development). Moreover, using craft as academic practice brings to the fore epistemological questions regarding legitimate knowledge and embodiment as a means of resisting and challenging organizations, what we have termed becoming an embodied inquirer.

Even with a critical mass of organization scholars writing with their bodies and advancing the understanding of embodiment both theoretically and empirically, it is still rebellious to think beyond the text for the majority of management and organization studies. Layers of stitching, embroidering secrets into the work or how the negative form of lace forms a voice in the text become ways of foregrounding the haptic and sensual elements of craft and provides an invitation to further consider how the body relates to organizations and research methodologies. Decades of writing that demonstrate the dark sides of organization and how disembodied employees have become in their work and whether they matter at all is testament to the idea that neglecting the body and the imagination, both vital in craft and making, is leading to dystopia which we can still avoid.

As scholar activists we have a role to play in insisting on the danger of this imbalance and denial of embodied resistance. The contradictory dynamics of academic

publishing that may promote innovative methodological practices but succumb to the weight of standardization are unable to adequately accommodate craft-based methodologies. Using craft and making practices to represent, transform or unearth different dimensions of organizations insists on self-reliance and support as well as resilience and self-motivation. Showing through making rather than telling through the generation of text or numbers might be our bravest act of resistance.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> See <https://www.accessart.org.uk/i-am-accessart-ann-rippin/>

## Author Biographies

Ann Rippin is an academic quilter, recently retired from the Department of Management at the University of Bristol where she was a reader in management. Her research interests included the aesthetics of organisation and alternative research methodologies, including the use of textiles. She was co-editor of *Culture and Organisation* and the Chair of the Standing Conference on Organisational Symbolism.

Sheena J. Vachhani is a Senior Lecturer in Management at the Department of Management, University of Bristol. Her work centres around embodiment, ethics

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